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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between parent-child attachment and parental attachment styles. It is hypothesized that: (1) parental attachment styles are transmitted to the infant through parent-child and parent-parent interaction; and (2) parental attachment styles are reflected in parent-child attachment. Some research supports the idea that parental mental models guide the parents' interactions with each other and with the child. The child assimilates these interactions to form its mental representation of affectionate others. Subjects in the study were 50 intact, one-child families. Mother-infant attachment was measured by means of the Strange Situation within 1 week of the child's first birthday. Parental attachment style was measured by means of an Adult Attachment Questionnaire. Results supported the hypothesis that parental attachment styles predict mother-infant attachment. Fathers' attachment styles dominated the prediction. It was only in regard to fear of closeness that fathers discriminated between secure and insecure infants. Parents of insecure infants were distinguished by maternal fear of closeness, paternal fear of abandonment, and paternal fear of dependency. (SH)

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The Intergenerational Transmission of Attachment Behavior

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The Intergeneration Transmission of Attachment Behavior

According to Bowlby (1988), infants develop "internal working models" (i.e., beliefs and expectations) of the responsiveness and emotional availability of caretakers. These models continue to develop through adolescence and become relatively stable. Once developed, the mental models serve to guide expectations and behaviors in adult attachment relationships.

For the most part, researchers have attempted to link the child's mental models to parental sensitivity or responsiveness. Some researchers, however, have come to recognize that parental sensitivity and responsiveness are influenced by the parent's personal experiences and beliefs. Stated differently, parental mental models guide the parents' interactions with each other as well as their interactions with the child. These interactions are assimilated by the child to form the child's mental representation of affectionate others.

Main, Kaplin, & Cassidy (1985) have provided support for the above idea in their research employing the Berkely Adult Attachment Interview. Main et al. assessed parent-child attachment at 1 and 6 years of age and rated the parents' discussion of their own security of attachment. Analysis of the results revealed that infant attachment classifications in the Ainsworth Strange Situation (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) were related to the parents' recollections of their own attachment relationships and attitudes toward attachment.

Main et al.'s (1985) findings provide valuable information in understanding how the parent's experiences and beliefs may be transmitted to the child. The present study is designed to expand upon Main et al.'s work by examining parent-child attachment and the attachment styles of both parents concurrently. This paradigm allows us to examine the interaction of parental attachment styles upon the child's mental models rather than considering each parent separately. A major strength of the present study is the use of multivariate analyses. Attachment researchers have typically relied on univariate analyses, especially correlation coefficients in testing their hypotheses. Such procedures are limited and may fail to uncover complex relationships. Multivariate procedures, on the other hand, allow the researchers to examine a variety of variables simultaneously in order to understand how the variables are related.

Attachment Theory

According to Bowlby (1988), humans have a natural propensity to form affectionate relationships with a few primary caretakers, usually one's mother. The infant will seek out the caretaker for comfort and security during times of stress and discomfort. Critical to attachment theory is the belief that the caretaker's response to the infant's attempts to maintain proximity or seek comfort determines the infant's mental models. For example, the infant will come to expect caretakers to be distant and unavailable (a negative mental model) if caretakers have been unresponsive to the infant's overtures in the past. More

important, the caretaker's behavior will influence the infant's mental model of self. For example, continuous rejection by the caretaker may lead the infant to believe that he or she is unworthy of affection and care.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) provided an important method for defining an infant's attachment style via the Strange Situation Paradigm. The Strange Situation involves a series of brief caretaker-infant separations and reunions designed to activate the infant's attachment system. Of particular interest is the infant's response to the caretaker's departure and return.

Ainsworth et al.'s work lead to the identification of three attachment styles: a secure attachment style and two insecure styles. The secure infant engages in protest behavior upon the departure of the caretaker, but is readily comforted by the caretaker upon return. The insecure/avoidant child, on the other hand, often seems unaffected by the caretaker's departure. There is little or no protest and the child seems to play normally throughout the assessment. The insecure/avoidant child also fails to display much interest in the caretaker's return and may even "snub" the caretaker by turning away. In contrast, the insecure/resistant child seems overwhelmed by the departure of the caretaker. Surprisingly, the return of the caretaker is greeted with conspicuous ambivalence. The child may approach the caretaker while simultaneously displaying anger.

Ainsworth et al. maintain that the three attachment styles displayed in the strange situation represent the child's mental models of that caretaker. The secure infant has learned that the

caretaker is dependable and will return to provide comfort. The avoidant infant has learned that the caretaker will not provide comfort and therefore does not seek the caretaker in the Strange Situation. Further, the avoidant infant tries to prevent emotional hurt by "detaching" from the caretaker. Finally, the resistant child is confused and frustrated. In the past the caretaker has been inconsistent in responding to the child. This frustration manifests itself in a display of anger.

Adult Attachment Styles

It is interesting to note that many of the behaviors displayed by infants in the Strange Situation can be seen in adults. Hofeller (1982) for example, notes that abusive males, when under stress, strike out at their adult partners, exhibiting behavior very similar to that of resistant infants. She further notes that these males report having had an "anxious relationship with their mothers" (pp. 42). Surprisingly, traditional attachment researchers have only recently begun to look at adult attachment styles and their relationship to adult affectionate relationships. This interest in adult attachment has been lead by the work of Hazan and Shaver (1987).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) introduced a measure of adult attachment known as the Attachment Style Prototype scale (ASP). The ASP consists of three brief descriptions of attitudes about close relationships. Each description is designed to be analogous to one of the three infant attachment styles defined by Ainsworth et al. (1978). Hazan and Shaver asked subjects to choose which of the three descriptions best represented their

beliefs about relationships. The results of Hazan and Shaver study revealed that the distribution of adult attachment styles was equivalent to that of the Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) normative sample of infant-mother attachment. In addition, Hazan and Shaver found that attachment styles reliably predicted the subjects' retrospective report of attachment to their parents, as well as their experiences in current relationships.

The development of the ASP has provided researchers with an opportunity to examine the relationship between adult mental models and affectionate relationships. The ASP also provides the opportunity to study infant-parent attachment and parental attachment styles concurrently. Historically, research has only been able to obtain retrospective reports of attachment.

Intergenerational Transmission of Attachment

As stated earlier, the child's interactions with caregivers determine the child's mental models of self and attachment figures. It is important to note that the parents' own mental models influence how they interact with their child. A parent who is avoidant would be less likely to show affectionate to the infant, resulting in the infant developing avoidant behavior. Moreover, the attachment styles of both parents must be considered. Markman (1989), for example, notes that it is the father's style of dealing with stress that determines the quality of marriage and the likelihood of relationship dissolution.

The present study was designed to examine the relationship between parental attachment styles and mother-infant attachment. Based upon the above discussion, we hypothesize that parental

attachment styles are transmitted to the infant through parent-child and parent-parent interaction and are reflected in parent-child attachment. Moreover, we believe that parent-child attachment is influenced by the attachment styles of both parents.

Methods

Subjects

Subjects in the present study were 50 intact, primiparous families participating in the TCU Child Development Project. Subjects were solicited from lists provide by the Tarrant County Bureau of Vital Statistics in Fort Worth, Texas. All participants were screened to insure that no other children lived in the home and that no known behavioral or developmental disorders existed. All of the families were Caucasian and middle to upper-middle class.

Measures

Mother-infant attachment. Mother-infant attachment was measured via the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978) within one week of the child's first birthday. The Strange Situation was videotaped and each tape scored by trained researchers. The two raters reported a 95% agreement using the three forced group classification system.

Adult attachment styles. Parental attachment style was measured employing a revised version of the Hazan and Shaver (1987) ASP measure. The revised version of the ASP, known as the Adult Attachment Questionnaire was developed by Clubb, Van Leeuwen and Giles-Sims (1989). The Adult Attachment

Questionnaire consists of a set of 15 statements derived from the ASP. The subjects were asked to indicate how much each of the questions reflect their own beliefs. Clubb et al. (1989) have reported that principle components analysis reveals three components: fear of intimacy, fear of closeness, and general relationship anxiety/fear of abandonment. The Adult Attachment Questionnaire is similar to a version of the ASP developed by Collins and Read (1989).

Procedures

The mothers and their infants arrived at the assessment lab and were taken to a waiting room. There the mothers completed a packet of questionnaires including the Adult Attachment Questionnaire while the infants played with toys. The entire packet required approximately 30 minutes to complete. Following this the infants and mothers were assessed in the Strange Situation. The mothers were thanked for their participation at the end of the assessment and given a research packet to take home to their husbands. The mothers were informed that their spouses were to complete the packets privately and return them to the researchers in the enclosed envelopes.

Results

The data were analyzed employing a discriminant analysis procedure. Mother-infant attachment served as the grouping variable and the parental scores on the three components of the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (see above) served as the predictor variables. The results of the analysis revealed two significant discriminant functions (see Table 1). The first

function was dominated by the father's fear of closeness and distinguished the secure group from the two insecure groups.. The second discriminant function was dominated by the father's fear of abandonment and fear of dependency, as well as, the mother's fear of closeness. Examination of the group centroids (see figure 1) reveals that resistant infants were found to have fathers who fear dependency and who are highly anxious about their relationships (fear of abandonment). At the same time, the resistant infants' mothers reported a high fear of closeness. The avoidant infants were further distinguished by fathers who lack interests in intimacy with their wives. The two functions together resulted in the correct classification of 42 of the 50 infants (84%) in the Strange Situation (see Table 2).

Discussion

The results of the present study support our prediction that parental attachment styles will predict mother-infant attachment. We were surprised by the finding that the fathers' attachment styles dominated the prediction. In fact, the results show that only the fathers' fear of closeness discriminated between the secure and insecure infants. The two insecure groups were distinguished by maternal fear of closeness, paternal fear of abandonment, and fear of dependercy.

In retrospect, the finding that the fathers' attachment styles maximally distinguishes between mother-child attachment is understandable. Consider the family in which the father avoids closeness. He is unlikely to comfort his spouse during times of stress, or to even be willing to talk about problems. This lack

of support may cause undue hardship on the mother. The extra stress would undoubtedly influence how she responds to her infant. She may push the child away, leading to an avoidant child. At the same time, the fathers lack of support may cause intense anxiety in a mother who already fears abandonment. This anxiety may be transmitted to the child.

We were not able to fully test these ideas in the present study. We did, however, further analyze the data of the eight children who were misclassified by our discriminant analysis. The five secure children classified as avoidant belonged to families who report high levels of stress due to employment problems. The misclassified insecure children were from families who reported little or no family stress.

The relationship between family stress, parental attachment styles, and child attachment must be explored further. It is possible that the relationships suggested by the present study actually reflect stress coping behavior in the family and not parental attachment styles. It is important to note, however, that attachment theory is a theory of personality development and would include predictions about how one responds to stress. A second important point supported by the present study is the importance of examining the family as a system. The child's attachment to mother was predicted by examining both the mother and father's influence. Such a procedure is important in understanding child development.

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Table 1.

Discriminant Loadings for the Prediction of Mother-Child Attachment by Adult Attachment.

Variables	Discriminant Loadings	
	DF-1	DF-2
Father		
Closeness	.75	.10
Fear of Abandonment	.26	-.58
Fear of Dependency	-.11	-.51
Female		
Closeness	-.16	-.41
Fear of Abandonment	.10	.04
Fear of Dependency	-.14	.09

Table 2.

Classification Matrix from the Discriminant Analysis.

Group	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Secure	30	0	5
Anxious	1	5	0
Avoidant	2	0	7

84 % correct classification

Figure 1.

Plot of group centroids in reduced discriminant space.